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**9.** Discuss the irony of the township's name. Is there any liberty for the novel's African-American characters there? How do their experiences compare to the freedoms and shackles Ruby encounters in New York?

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**10.** Otha Jennings and Ruby both lose their sanity as a result of Reverend Jennings's actions, while chapter twenty reveals the Reverend's own tormented past. In the novel, how do women and men react differently to trauma? How are the expectations for Liberty's girls different from those for the boys?

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**11.** The author gives us vivid scenes of the night on which Ruby's fate was hinged. What were the Reverend's motivations that night? As you read the scene from the perspective of different characters, how did your perceptions change?

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**12.** Evoking the image of a precious gem, why is Ruby's name appropriate? Throughout her life, what is she taught about her beauty and her value?

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**13.** What common losses do Ruby and Ephram share, from childhood to adulthood? What opens their eyes to the possibility of peace? What do you predict for their future?

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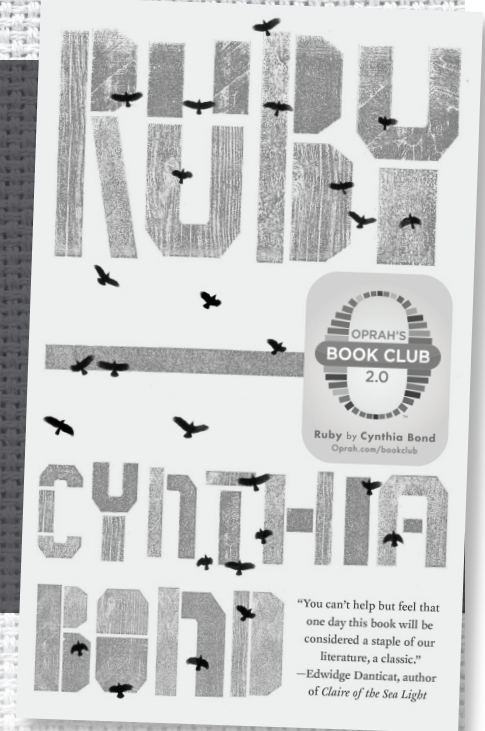
**14.** Although Ruby is a work of fiction, the situations it describes are very much a reality. How can you and your community help protect the most vulnerable?

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## Discussion Questions

"Bond proves to be a powerful literary force, a writer whose unflinching yet lyrical prose is reminiscent of Toni Morrison's."

- *O, The Oprah Magazine*



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**Cynthia Bond** has taught writing to homeless and at-risk youth throughout Los Angeles for more than fifteen years. She attended Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, then moved to New York and attended the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. A PEN/Rosenthal Fellow, Bond founded the Blackbird Writing Collective in 2011. At present, Bond teaches therapeutic writing at Paradigm Malibu Adolescent Treatment Center. A native of East Texas, she lives in Los Angeles with her daughter.

## Book Summary

The epic, unforgettable story of a man determined to protect the woman he loves from the town desperate to destroy her, this beautiful and devastating debut heralds the arrival of a major new voice in fiction.

Ephram Jennings has never forgotten the beautiful girl with the long braids running through the piney woods of Liberty, their small East Texas town. Young Ruby Bell, "the kind of pretty it hurt to look at," has suffered beyond imagining, so as soon as she can, she flees suffocating Liberty for the bright pull of 1950s New York.

Ruby quickly winds her way into the ripe center of the city—the darkened piano bars and hidden alleyways of the Village—all the while hoping for a glimpse of the red hair and green eyes of her mother. When a telegram from her cousin forces her to return home, thirty-year-old Ruby finds herself reliving the devastating violence of her girlhood. With the terrifying realization that she might not be strong enough to fight her way back out again, Ruby struggles to survive her memories of the town's dark past.

Meanwhile, Ephram must choose between loyalty to the sister who raised him and the chance for a life with the woman he has loved since he was a boy.

Full of life, exquisitely written, and suffused with the pastoral beauty of the rural South, *Ruby* is a transcendent novel of passion and courage. This wondrous page-turner rushes through the red dust and gossip of Main Street, to the pit fire where men swill bootleg outside Bloom's Juke, to Celia Jennings's kitchen, where a cake is being made, yolk by yolk, that Ephram will use to try to begin again with Ruby.

Utterly transfixing, with unforgettable characters, riveting suspense, and breathtaking, luminous prose, *Ruby* offers an unflinching portrait of man's dark acts and the promise of the redemptive power of love

## Discussion Questions

1. How did Ruby's story change the way you view the world? What does the novel show us about the nature of trauma and the power of compassion?
2. Celia copes with tragedy by putting her world in strict order, from her family life to her church life. But Ruby becomes lost to disorder. What accounts for their different approaches to emotional pain?
3. At the heart of the novel is Ruby's vision of her children, and her vision of herself as a mother. How is she able to respond with a nurturing urge although no one nurtured her? Discuss the roles of mothers and fathers in Liberty.
4. How did your understanding of the Dyboù shift throughout the novel? Do you believe that evil comes from the supernatural or spiritual, or that it is simply part of human nature?
5. What protection do you think Ma Tante gives to young Maggie, Ruby, and Ephram? Are they comforted by her powers, or does she only stoke their fears?
6. What fuels the racism depicted in the novel? Do some of these factors persist today? Discuss Ruby's different experiences with racism in East Texas, New York City, and on her trip back to Liberty.
7. As you read the story of Ruby's mother, how did you react to the notion that the past is still present? What does it take to overcome the Bell family's legacy?
8. What role does Christianity play in Liberty? Does faith enhance or hinder Celia and her congregation in their attempts to heal Ruby? What does Ephram's baptism mean to him?